

ROUNDTABLE 1
Teaching from Within:
How Religious Study Shapes Pedagogical Practice

Gaston Bacquet Quiroga (University of Glasgow) – Convenor, **Tim Jensen** (University of Southern Denmark, Odense & Vicepresident of CIPSH) – Respondent, **Paul Eaton** (University of Alabama), **Ricardo Montelongo** (Sam Houston State University, Huntsville)

This presentation explores a Buddhist-informed relational pedagogy grounded in the daily practice of meditation and the cultivation of the *brahmavihārās*—loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity—as the foundation for teaching and learning. Rather than treating meditation as an isolated personal practice, I approach it as a way of orienting myself toward the world and toward my students. Meditation becomes a form of preparation, shaping the tone of classroom presence, the emotional texture of interactions, and the ethical intentions underlying pedagogical decisions. Central to this approach is ongoing reflection on the five *skandhas*—form, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness—as they unfold in real time during moments of challenge. When students are disengaged, unprepared, or struggling, awareness of these internal processes help me shape my responses with patience and curiosity rather than reactivity. The classroom thus becomes a site of shared becoming rather than performance. Drawing on the *brahmavihārās* also informs how I design learning environments. I intentionally create spaces and temporal structures, such as collaborative projects that support relational trust, and a sense of community grounded in mutual care rather than competition. Through narrative reflection and classroom-based examples, this paper discusses how Buddhist contemplative practices can sustain an educational ethos that nurtures the whole person—teacher and student alike. In doing so, it contributes to broader conversations in how one’s belief system can have a holistic orientation, and about how to cultivate wisdom, compassion, and embodied presence in daily pedagogical life.

ROUNDTABLE 2
Transnational Anti-Cult Activism and Esoteric Spiritual Movements

Márk Nemes (CESNUR, Turin / Hungarian Academy of Arts) – Convenor, **Massimo Introvigne** (CESNUR), **Rosita Soryte** (European Federation for Freedom of Belief, Rome)

This roundtable aims to open discussion and explore the new wave of transnational anti-cult activism targeting esoteric spiritual movements. With the resurgence of long-rejected concepts, such as “brainwashing” and „mental manipulation,” renewed moral panics emerge, now focusing on unique esoteric movements that provide alternative ways of expressing and experiencing sexuality, spirituality, and bodily autonomy. The session discusses three interconnected themes, each with a dedicated introduction. These are the excessive policing of esoteric erotic traditions and the emergence of a broader global moral panic against esoteric spiritual movements; the role of the media in shaping biased, reductive public narratives and in fueling moral panics; and the roles of disgruntled apostates, who chose to become vocational “experts” and “whistleblowers.” Their accounts are frequently overexposed in the media, significantly affecting public perception of esoteric movements and causing legal, economic, and even FoRB-related implications.

ROUNDTABLE 3
Roundtable on The Magical Diaries of Leah Hirsig, 1923–1925

Henrik Bogdan (University of Gothenburg) – Convenor, **Manon Hedenborg White** (Malmö University), **Massimo Introvigne** (CESNUR, Turin), **Marco Pasi** (EPHE-PSL, Paris)

This roundtable takes the volume *The Magical Diaries of Leah Hirsig, 1923–1925: Aleister Crowley, Magick, and the New Occult Woman* (Oxford University Press, 2025), edited by Manon Hedenborg White and Henrik Bogdan, as a point of departure for a broader discussion of gender, authority, lived religious practice, and the social and material dimensions of twentieth century occultism. The session uses the diaries as a rich empirical and methodological entry point into wider questions central to the study of esotericism and new religious movements. The diaries provide unusually detailed documentation of everyday magical practice, bodily discipline, relational (proximal) authority, and gendered power dynamics within an initiatory occult milieu. They also raise important methodological issues concerning the use of intimate personal documents as sources, the relationship between normative doctrine and lived practice, and the researcher's positionality when working with ethically sensitive material. The roundtable brings together scholars whose work has significantly shaped contemporary research on esotericism and new religious movements. The discussants approach the material from complementary perspectives, including ritual practice, gender and charisma, lived religion, and sociological and historical approaches to alternative religious movements. The session is organised as a roundtable rather than a series of formal papers. Short opening remarks by each participant will serve as a springboard for a moderated discussion and audience engagement, fostering comparative and cross-disciplinary dialogue.

ROUNDTABLE 4

Independent Investigative Journalism, Media Integrity, and Religion in the Public Sphere

Filip Standavid (Recorder, Bucharest) – Convenor, **Paula Erizanu** (Veridica, Chişinău-Bucharest) – Convenor, **Victor Ilie** (Drepturi şi strâmbe, Bucharest), **Adina Marincea** (The “Elie Wiesel” National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, Bucharest), **Diana Oncioiu** (Delao.ro / Să fie lumină, Bucharest), **Vlad Stoicescu** (Delao.ro / Să fie lumină, Bucharest), **Emilia Şercan** (PressOne, Bucharest), **Ovidiu Vanghele** (Să fie lumină, Bucharest), **Luiza Vasiliu** (Drepturi şi strâmbe, Bucharest).

This roundtable discussion will address for the first time in a global scholarly setting, with hundreds of participants from 50 countries in five continents coming to Bucharest EASR | IAHR Congress, the roles independent investigative journalism and media integrity play in discovering and debating chief problems of religion/s in the public sphere. Leading investigative journalists from independent media will first present an overview of results from their recent and current investigations and scholars of religion from a wide range of disciplines and methodologies will then have an opportunity to debate with them the integration of such major public revelations within the panorama of current religious changes as studied by their own works. The roundtable will favour, but will not be limited to the investigations probing widespread corruption cases within religious institutions; the plague of plagiarism by authors representing religious institutions, from PhD students to high officials; religious conspiracy before, during and after the pandemic; religion's uses and abuses in ‘the manosphere’; neo-Fascism and far right religious stances and the accruals of antisemitism in contemporary media; revelations of horrid sexual abuse by high representatives of Christian Orthodox, Catholic and (Neo)Protestant churches in contemporary Romania. While neighbouring scholarly advances in the study of contemporary religious life in Romania and more generally in Europe, an in-depth dialogue between investigative journalism and academic scholarship on contemporary religion would foster both media *and* scholarly integrity, in local and global contexts variously defined today by false manipulation of public data, hybrid wars, and the silencing of critical voices in a vulnerable democracy.

ROUNDTABLE 6

Traditionalist Perennialism and Eastern Orthodoxy

Mark Sedgwick (Aarhus University) – Convenor, **Ayesha Adamo** (Rice University), **Ionuţ Daniel Băncilă** (Institute for the History of Religions, Bucharest), **Eugen Ciurtin** (Institute for the History of Religions, Bucharest)

Traditionalist Perennialism, often simply called “Traditionalism,” is an intellectual movement and school of thought developed over the years since 1911 by a large cast of thinkers and scholars headed by the French “metaphysician” René Guénon (Abdalwahid Yahia, 1886–1951). It aims to recover and revive what Guénon called the “primordial tradition,” which is much the same as what is generally called the “perennial philosophy.” Perennialism is a long-standing position in the history of religions; what distinguishes Traditionalism from other forms of perennialism is its comprehensive and fundamental critique of modernity. This has given it political as well as religious significance. Traditionalism was developed first in French-language publications and then in English. Its reception in France and the Anglosphere has been well studied. As a school of practice, it emphasizes above all the Sufi tradition of Islam, and in second place the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Despite this, relatively little work has been done on Traditionalist Perennialism and Eastern Orthodoxy, save in the case of the leading Russian Traditionalist Aleksander Dugin, who has received much attention given his political importance. The reception of Traditionalism in two other Eastern Orthodox countries, Serbia and Romania, has received some attention, as have some of the Western Traditionalists who became Eastern Orthodox, but there has been no systematic attention paid to the Eastern Orthodox world and faith, and nothing has yet been published on such major Orthodox countries as Ukraine and Greece. A collective work on the reception of Traditionalist perennialism in the Eastern Orthodox world and faith is therefore under preparation, and this round table will bring together several participants in this project with a view to presenting the project to a wider scholarly public and to refining its scope and objectives.

ROUNDTABLE 7

On the Altar:

A History of Sacrifice from the Sacred to the Secular

Jonathan Sheehan (University of California, Berkeley) – Convenor, **Philippe Borgeaud** (University of Geneva), **Cristiana Facchini** (University of Bologna), **Robert Yelle** (LMU Munich)

Jonathan Sheehan is the Sidney Hellman Ehrman Professor of European History at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of, among many other works, *The Enlightenment Bible* (Princeton University Press, 2005). His newest monograph, based on years of research, is *On the Altar: A History of Sacrifice from the Sacred to the Secular* (Princeton University Press, 2026). This panel brings together several scholars of religion with different perspectives to discuss *On the Altar* with Professor Sheehan. Sacrifice is of course a central category for reflection, both within religious traditions and by scholars of religion. Sheehan’s work is distinguished by careful attention to the historical development and transformation of the category of sacrifice within biblical traditions and how reflection on this category shaped our modern, ostensibly secular world. The following description of the book has been supplied by the author: “From the beginning, sacrifice has lived uneasily in Christianity. The sacrifice to end all sacrifice—so the Christians called their Messiah, the Crucifixion abolishing the temple sacrifices of Judaism and paganism. And yet Christian imagination swelled with sacrifice. At the center of the lived faith were sacrifices repeated, the offering of Christ’s body, the sacrifices of ancient patriarchs, the sacrifices of martyrs woven through liturgy, theology, and popular devotion. Abandoned yet essential, sacrifice has thus lived a double life, a sign of what has been left behind, and a promise of something new and better. In the sixteenth century, this double life collapsed. In that fracture of Latin Christianity called the Reformation, quarreling heirs to Christian truth discovered that the sacrifices they once called Christian might be nothing of the sort. To build their new faiths – to discover the truth of Christian sacrifice—they turned to the past, Christianity as it was teaching how Christianity ought to be. *On the Altar* is a book about this, and what happened next. It is, on the one hand, a history of the Christian imagination across the centuries of Reformation, when new martyrs and holy warriors fought for the truth of their sacrifices, when the empire of New World sacrifice was recruited to settle Christian conflicts, when the sacrifices of the ancient Hebrews were weaponized for orthodoxy. And it is, on the other hand,

a history of the secular imagination too. For by the eighteenth century, a by-now vast archive of Christian sacrifice was dispersed ad saeculum, applied to the things that humans make, from their religions to their politics to the institutions of their social lives. In sacrifice, we discover both a new history of Christianity and of the secular world in which we still live.” Comments on the book will be offered by Philippe Borgeaud (University of Geneva, em.), Cristiana Facchini (University of Bologna), Yvonne Sherwood (University of Oslo), and Robert Yelle (LMU Munich). Professor Sheehan will offer a response, after which the discussion will be opened to the audience.

ROUNDTABLE 8 Buddhism in Europe

Jørn Borup (Aarhus University), **Knut Jacobsen** (University of Bergen), **Marzenna Jakubczak-Borge** (Jagiellonian University, Kraków), **Samuel Thévoz** (University of Graz), **Anita Stasulane** (Daugavpils University), **Katarina Plank** (Karlstad University), **Almut-Barbara Renger** (University of Basel), **Martin Rötting** (University of Salzburg), **Lyudmila Klasanova** (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia).

Buddhism has become an established part of Europe’s religious landscape, yet its forms and future are both dynamic and diverse. This panel, featuring contributors to the forthcoming *Handbook of Buddhism in Europe*, opens for discussing contemporary and future perspectives centering on two broad questions. Firstly, **What, if anything, is distinctively European about Buddhism in Europe?** Possible questions to discuss: to what extent is the “migrant” and “convert” categories relevant, how have European intellectual traditions, political structures, and cultural imaginaries shaped Buddhist thought and practice, what are the dynamics behind secular reinterpretations and diasporic negotiations of identity in the very category of “European Buddhism”?

The second broad question investigates: **What futures are emerging for Buddhism in Europe?** Possible topics of discussion could be: demographic shifts, migration patterns, generational changes, social engagement, and new ethical debates in the reshaping of Buddhist communities. Is European Buddhism moving toward greater pluralism, deeper institutionalization, or new hybrid forms with new generations challenging extant ways of Buddhist identification, practice and belonging? By bringing together diverse case studies and theoretical perspectives, the panel aims to spark debate about the transformations and possibilities that will define Buddhism’s next chapter in Europe.

All are welcome to come and listen to the discussions.

ROUNDTABLE 9 Roundtable on German-speaking Religionswissenschaft in International Perspective

Michael Stausberg (University of Bergen) – Convenor, **Katharina Wilkens** (University of Tübingen) – Convenor, **Roberto Alciati** (University of Florence), **Markus A. Davidsen** (University of Leiden), **Lidia Guzy** (University College Cork), **Chiara Tommasi** (University of Pisa), **Lech Trzcionkowski** (Jagiellonian University Kraków).

The EASR brings together scholars from a range of different national academic cultures, within which the study of religions is practiced in markedly different ways. In 2025, a new introductory textbook was published in German — *Religionswissenschaft: Aktuelle Annäherungen* [current approaches] (de Gruyter, Open Access) — comprising 27 chapters written by professors of Religionswissenschaft in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The contributors were free to choose their own topics, selecting what they considered to be of interest to students and a broader audience. In this way, the volume offers a unique window into how the study of religions is interpreted and practiced in German-speaking Europe. For this roundtable, the editors have invited scholars from four other European countries to comment on the distinctive features of the discipline as it is manifested in this volume, bringing the

perspective of their own national academic cultures to bear on what they find familiar, absent, surprising, or even problematic.

ROUNDTABLE IO

EASR Working Group on Theorizing Religion's (in formation): Women Pioneers in the Study of Religion: A Roundtable Discussion

Göran Larsson (University of Gothenburg) – Convenor, **Jessica Albrecht** (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg), **Siv Ellen Kraft** (The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø), **Susanne Olsson** (Stockholm University), **Amy Allocco** (Elon University).

The study of religion is often associated with “founding fathers” such as Max Müller (1823–1900) or Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931). However, this focus reflects an unfortunate bias that downplays and obscures the contributions of women scholars in the early development of the discipline. The aim of this roundtable is to discuss the need to re-evaluate the disciplinary history of the study of religion from a critical perspective and to highlight the importance of women scholars such as, for instance, Mary Douglas (1921–2007), Patricia Crone (1945–2015), Anne-Marie Schimmel (1922–2003), Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004), Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), etcetera. Furthermore, the intention is to bring scholars from different geographical and intellectual locations together to reflect on women pioneers and the disciplinary history of religious studies. At the same time, the roundtable raises methodological and practical questions: Who should be included in such a canon, and how should the study of religion be delimited in relation to adjacent fields such as anthropology, sociology, or philology? Is such a limitation necessary at all?

A broader aim of the roundtable is to discuss these and related questions in order to initiate a process of documenting a largely overlooked aspect of the discipline's history—namely, the role and contributions of women pioneers in the early study of religion. The roundtable is convened by Göran Larsson, and all participants have been asked to provide a short rationale addressing the questions outlined above, as well as to suggest tentative names and examples of scholars who might be included in a canon of women pioneers in the study of religion.

ROUNDTABLE II

Narrating the Anthropocene: Religious Responses to Planetary Crisis

Knut A. Jacobsen (University of Bergen), **Almut-Barbara Renger** (University of Basel / Humboldt University of Berlin).

In recent years, the concept of the **Anthropocene** has emerged as a powerful framework for understanding the entanglement of human activity and planetary transformation. While widely debated across the natural and social sciences, its implications for the study of religion remain comparatively underexplored. Religious traditions, however, do not merely respond to ecological crises; they actively participate in shaping how such crises are interpreted, narrated, and lived.

This panel seeks to examine how religious actors, traditions, and discourses engage with the Anthropocene as both a scientific concept and a broader cultural narrative. We understand “narrating” in a broad sense, encompassing not only textual and discursive articulations but also ritual, embodied, and material practices through which the Anthropocene is made meaningful. Rather than approaching religions as passive recipients of environmental knowledge, this panel foregrounds their role in producing, translating, and contesting narratives of crisis, responsibility, and planetary futures.

We are particularly interested in contributions that explore how the Anthropocene is received, appropriated, challenged, or reconfigured within diverse religious contexts. This includes theological

reflection, ethical discourse, ritual practice, institutional responses, and lived religion, as well as tensions between global environmental frameworks and local religious epistemologies. Papers may also address how religious traditions negotiate questions of agency, accountability, and more-than-human relations in the context of planetary crisis.

By bringing together perspectives from different traditions, regions, and methodological approaches, this panel aims to contribute to broader discussions on religion as a site of knowledge production in the Anthropocene. In doing so, it highlights the importance of religion in shaping not only ethical responses to ecological crises but also the conceptual frameworks through which such crises are understood.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Religious interpretations, appropriations, or critiques of the Anthropocene
- Narrative, ritual, and material practices as forms of environmental meaning-making
- Theological and cosmological reconfigurations of human–environment relations
- Indigenous and local epistemologies in dialogue with global environmental discourse
- Religion, agency, and responsibility in the context of planetary crisis
- Institutional, political, or activist dimensions of religious environmental engagement
- Comparative and cross-traditional perspectives on religion and the Anthropocene

Selected contributions from the panel may be considered for a planned publication.

ROUNDTABLE 12

Generative AI and Religious Education: Challenges, Blind Spots, and New Directions

Jenny Berglund (University of Stockholm / EASR Working group on Religion in Public Education) – Convenor, **Göran Larsson** (University of Gothenburg), **Jonas Svensson** (Linnaeus University), **Karna Kjeldsen** (University College Absalon, Roskilde) – Respondent.

This roundtable is organized by editors Jenny Berglund, Göran Larsson, and Jonas Svensson of a special issue of *Religion and Education* devoted to the intersection of religious education (RE) and generative artificial intelligence (genAI), and constitutes part of the activities of the EASR Working Group on Religion in Public Education. The rapid emergence and widespread adoption of genAI is reshaping educational landscapes globally, with significant implications for RE. The roundtable brings together scholars working at this intersection to examine the current state of research, identify its limitations, and explore insufficiently addressed questions in existing scholarship. Drawing on the editors' introduction to the special issue, the roundtable addresses a notable blind spot in the field: insufficient attention to the distinction between confessional and non-confessional models of RE. These models differ substantially in their aims and institutional contexts, and concerns associated with genAI — including hallucinations, algorithmic bias, and questions of epistemic and religious authority — carry different implications depending on which model is under consideration. Existing research has tended to treat RE as a relatively uniform field, obscuring consequential differences in how genAI may affect teaching and learning across varied educational settings. A second theme concerns genAI as a research instrument within the academic study of RE. The roundtable draws on an experiment in which deep research functionalities across several major AI platforms were used to conduct a scoping review of the field, raising questions about reliability, transparency, and the methodological implications of AI-generated literature reviews. The roundtable invites participants to reflect on empirical lacunae; on how genAI may affect intercultural and interreligious understanding in formal educational settings; and on how RE scholars might engage critically and constructively with a technology already transforming pedagogical practice. Karna Kjeldsen will serve as respondent.

ROUNDTABLE 13
25 Years of Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religions:
Story, Challenges, and Contributions

Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson (Vilnius University) – Convenor, **Milda Ališauskienė** (Vytautas Magnus University), **Audrius Beinorius** (Vilnius University), **Grażina Bielousova** (Vytautas Magnus University / Vilnius University).

The roundtable is dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religions (LSSR). Founded on October 1, 2001, and having renewed its activities on June 6, 2011, the LSSR has played a significant role in fostering the academic study of religion in Lithuania. The discussion focuses on such topics as the founding and the history of the LSSR, LSSR activities and its members' key research topics on the national and international levels. It also addresses the current position of the LSSR within the Lithuanian academic society and considers its future prospects.

In the discussion, members of the LSSR will reflect on their scholarly engagement with the Society and its impact on the development of religious studies in the country. We will examine the challenges faced by the newly established Society and the legal situation regarding religious activities in Lithuania, which had recently regained its Independence. What were the relationships and tensions between the dominant religious communities and religious minorities? What institutional and academic obstacles were encountered in developing the field that had to be overcome? What new theoretical approaches and empirical research methods did scholars begin to develop and apply in the country, etc?

Participants in the roundtable include Milda Ališauskienė, Audrius Beinorius, Gražina Bielousova, Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson, as well as other members of the LSSR.

ROUNDTABLE 14
Critical Religion: Exploring the Revolution

Naomi Goldenberg (University of Ottawa), **Alex Henley** (Institute of Ismaili Studies, London), **Aaron Hughes** (University of Rochester, NY & University of Stockholm), **Peggy Schmeiser** (University of Saskatchewan), **Teemu Taira** (University of Helsinki), **David O'Reilly**, University of Waterloo/ Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

This roundtable brings together contributors to a new volume, *A Practical Guide to Critical Religion* (Bloomsbury, 2026), to explore what Daniel Dubuisson has called 'a veritable scientific revolution' in religious studies departments (2019: 1). As the 2026 Congress invites us to reflect on the purpose and value of our discipline, this session leverages the authors' efforts to survey the current state of Critical Religion, building on that work to articulate its most promising new directions. Five speakers have been selected to represent a variety of sub-fields and to highlight the potential of Critical Religion to advance knowledge across disciplines and beyond academia. The discussion will be framed by two overarching inquiries. First, we ask: what is most revolutionary about Critical Religion today? By provincialising the category 'religion', critical approaches do not merely deconstruct a term but fundamentally redraw our maps of social life, power and identity. The panel will discuss how this shift transforms related categories and concepts, and how it intersects with – or creates tensions within – emancipatory and decolonial aims. We consider the ethical responsibilities that follow from recognising 'religion' as a classificatory tool of governance rather than a naturally-occurring phenomenon, and how this 'revolution' might transform

public policy, law, media representations and public history. Second, panellists will discuss how these theoretical trajectories excite and reshape their own empirical work. By setting aside ‘religion’ as an analytical category, alternative patterns of data become visible and fresh modes of inquiry open up before us. The contributors will share how working genealogically and deconstructively has changed their understandings of statecraft, sovereignty and the management of people in their respective field sites. Ultimately, this roundtable seeks to demonstrate that far from being a moribund discipline, the study of religion – when approached through such critical lenses – offers vital insights into the unravelling of categories like politics, culture and the secular, creating surprising and necessary connections with fields far beyond conventional religious studies.

ROUNDTABLE 15

Infrastructure matters! Or: how can the study of religion navigate the digital turn?

Mareike Heinritz (University of Tübingen) – Convenor, **Louise Neubronner** (University of Tübingen) – Convenor, **Natalia Zawiejska** (Jagiellonian University, Kraków), **Karen Nikiforov** (Kyiv School of Economics), **Ruslan Khalikov** (Religion on Fire project / Workshop for Academic Study of Religion, Kyiv), **Alessandra Vitullo** (Sapienza University of Rome) | **Tomáš Hampejs**, Masaryk University, Brno | **Adrian Hermann**, University of Bonn

Recent developments in both society and academia have prompted the study of religion to engage increasingly with “the digital,” a trend that is likely to intensify in the coming years. This engagement unfolds along two closely related dimensions. On the one hand, it encompasses the investigation of religion within digital environments – commonly conceptualized as “digital religion” – as an object of study in its own right. On the other hand, it involves the application and critical adaptation of digital methods within the study of religion, drawing in particular on approaches developed in the digital humanities and computational social sciences (Neumaier and Elwert 2026). Beyond individual research initiatives, many of them driven by early-career scholars, a growing number of collaborative projects and institutional frameworks within the discipline are dedicated to digital approaches. Several of these initiatives have already reached completion and, fittingly, disseminate their findings in digital formats. As a result, a steadily expanding body of literature has emerged, including project reports, methodological reflections, tool descriptions, and comprehensive handbooks addressing the digital in the study of religion. Despite these developments, there remains a noticeable lack of sustained transnational and cross-project exchange, particularly with regard to the practical challenges which are associated with research projects in the digital sphere. Addressing this gap, the roundtable draws on selected examples from the participants’ own research and teaching experience to foster a structured discussion of key questions, including but not limited to: 1. What opportunities and added value do digital methods and tools offer? 2. How do digital methods/tools influence the way religion(s) is/are studied? 3. What methodological, technical, or ethical challenges arise in this context? 4. What kinds of infrastructures are required to support digitally oriented research? 5. How can project results be preserved and made permanently accessible beyond the lifespan of individual projects? 6. How can accessibility to the growing range of tools and projects be streamlined, and how can a comprehensive overview be gained? The roundtable aims not only to stimulate scholarly exchange on these issues but also to identify shared needs and priorities. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the development of sustainable research infrastructures for the digital study of religion.

ROUNDTABLE 16

Imagineering Religion in 360°:

A Practice-Oriented Roundtable on Immersive Media, Heritage, and Public Imagination

Ernst van den Hemel (Utrecht University / Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) – Convenor, **Rachel Blokhuis-Koopman** (Meertens Institute, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences), **Ayşenur Korkmaz** (Meertens Institute), **Welmoed Wagenaar** (Meertens Institute), **Kai Shmushko** (University of Amsterdam).

This practice-oriented roundtable brings together researchers from the ERC-funded project MAKEBELIEF (www.makebelief.nl) to explore how immersive media environments shape the public imagination of religion, heritage, and national identity in the twenty-first century. Central to the session is a methodological experiment: each contribution is accompanied by immersive 360° footage from the presented case studies, allowing participants to collectively engage the sensory, spatial, and affective dimensions of these sites.

The project investigates locations such as theme parks, museums, and heritage installations where religion is mediated through combinations of architecture, spectacle, and media technologies. These environments mobilize immersive forms—from panoramic paintings and immersive video installations to holographic characters and live reenactment—to produce compelling experiences of religion and history. Rather than only analyzing these environments, this roundtable foregrounds how such experiences can be studied, documented, and shared through 360° media as a research practice.

Each participant presents a short case study: Dollywood in the United States, where Christian-inflected heritage and entertainment intersect, including the *The Dolly Parton Experience*, a multimedia museum on Dolly Parton's life featuring an immersive 360° video installation; conquest-themed panorama museums in Turkey (such as Panorama 1453 and Panorama 1326 staging and animating Islamic-Ottoman history through immersive visual media; open-air museums in the Netherlands, such as Museumpark Orientalis, which present worlds of the past through scenography and reenactment while increasingly engaging new audiences; and the Islam Experience Center in Rotterdam-Zuid, featuring media such as a holographic AI-imam designed to counter Islamophobia.

The roundtable invites participants to engage directly with 360° audiovisual material as a way of probing key questions in sensory ethnography: How do immersive media reconfigure ethnographic observation and representation? What forms of, immersion, embodiment, and interpretation emerge when research is shared in 360°? And how can such methods help us better understand the role of immersive environments in shaping contemporary public religion?

Taken together, the cases reveal how immersive environments in the public sphere blur boundaries between politics, heritage, entertainment, and religion, challenging the religious-secular binary, and how they function as cultural arenas in a broader struggle for the imagination. By emphasizing practice and shared exploration, the roundtable creates a space for collective reflection on both the stakes of these developments and the methodological challenges of studying religion through and within immersive media.

ROUNDTABLE 17

New Books on Motherhood and Religions

Florence Pasche Guignard (Université Laval, Québec) – Convenor, **Joanna Krotofil** (Jagiellonian University, Kraków), **Giulia Pedrucci** (Comenius University, Bratislava), **Steven Geusens** (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), **Ionuț Daniel Băncilă** (Institute for the History of Religions, Bucharest)

This session presents and discusses two publications that advance the scholarly study of motherhood in religious contexts. The first is the volume *Beyond Mother Goddesses: Mothers, Motherhood and Mothering at the Intersection with Religions* (Routledge, 2026). This work employs an innovative format,

featuring eleven in-depth interviews with scholars who have shaped the field. It discusses the critical study of figures, representations, discourses, and practices situated at the complex intersection of the maternal with the religious or spiritual. The second project is the forthcoming *Handbook on Motherhood and Religions* (Bloomsbury, 2027), a collective volume with over thirty chapters. Designed to provide extensive and global coverage, the chapters address a wide array of topics and cultural areas across both historical and contemporary periods, and span diverse religious and spiritual traditions. Several co-editors and contributing authors will participate in a round-table to trace the collaborative genesis and evolution of these projects. The discussion will retrace their development from an initial 2019 session of the Comparative Studies in Religion Unit at the American Academy of Religion, through to a series of five open panels at the 2025 World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions. Together, the participants will reflect on the conceptual importance of centering scholarly inquiry not merely on gender or women, but specifically on the categories of mothers, motherhood, and mothering, within religious studies. They will also highlight the importance of cross-cultural comparative frameworks and international academic collaborations in enriching our understanding of these central themes.

ROUNDTABLE 18

Liminality 360 – ‘States of in Between’ in Contemporary Religion through discussion of Multiple Liminalities of Lay Buddhism in Contemporary China

Kai Shmushko (University of Amsterdam) – Convenor, **Carolina Ivanescu** (University of Amsterdam), **Jacob F. Tischler** (Charles University Prague), **Martin Lavička** (Palacký University Olomouc).

We are living in times of an accelerated reality. Due to globalization and technological progress, we are exposed to multiple cultures and influences, making the process of growing and adapting rapid and frequent. Social processes and changes take place often, at times abruptly, and fast. Our social spheres have become, in many aspects, borderless. Faraway worlds are now close. We constantly transcend and cross territorial, cultural, and epistemological borders. We physically travel more than we ever have, and we are travelling digitally almost all the time. Children “grow up” fast, older people stay “young” longer. Many people’s convictions, opinions, philosophical and even religious orientations shift constantly. But have social and cultural shifts become easier? clearer? Because of these accelerating dispositions? Has our ability to cross borders (real and symbolic) numbed or softened the transformative and impactful human experience of going through these shifts? Have transitions (social, spiritual, religious) now become meaningless? At the turn of the 20th century, Arnold van Gennep introduced the term “liminality” in his work “The Rites of Passage” (1909). Liminality was described as the middle, “threshold” phase where individuals are between social statuses. His model showed how rituals stabilize social order by guiding people through change. Several decades later, Victor Turner expanded on van Gennep’s idea, in works such as “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual” (1973), emphasising liminality’s social and symbolic power. He described liminality as a space of ambiguity and equality that can produce *communitas*. Turner later developed the idea of the *Liminoid*, applying liminality to modern, voluntary activities like art, theatre, and leisure rather than strictly ritual transitions. For more than a century, this body of theory has had a major impact across anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. Liminality assisted scholars in understanding and interpreting pilgrimage, conversion, and initiation rituals. Beyond that, it shaped how sociologists have viewed transitions like marriage, graduation, and migration. The term liminality also created a tremendous impact on the study of religion, trans-disciplinary. In *Multiple Liminalities of Lay Buddhism in Contemporary China*, Shmushko engages with this body of theory, taking both terms to explore contemporary Buddhism in China. To delineate the state of lay Buddhism (non-monastic Buddhism), she draws on the interpretations of these two theoretical terms, viewing them as two terms on a continuum. Throughout the chapters of this book, both liminality in its broader interpretation as states of in-betweenness and, more robustly, a variety of modern liminoid forms, are applied. Shmushko further proposes that liminalities work in both constructive and destructive manners, as they shape the sphere of lay Buddhism in China today. Ambiguous boundaries at times serve as avenues for lay Buddhist actors’

responses to the complex challenges, such as state regulation, societal critique, orthopraxical dilemmas, and the lack of means or available modalities to uphold Buddhist practice. However, liminalities also describe situations or states that stand as a challenge, obstruction, or interference to manifestations of lay Buddhism. This panel aims to address the relevance of In Betweenness, of Liminalities as frameworks of being between two states of identity or status, to contemporary religious studies. Through engaging in a critical reading of the book, the discussants in this book discussion will delve into “liminality” and “Liminoid”, reviewing the potency, relevancy, and limitations of this framework for the interdisciplinary study of religion more broadly. Approaching this topic from multiple perspectives, the participants of this book discussion possess diverse academic backgrounds, with various expertise in the study of religion:

Proposed format:

Part 1: The discussants, respectively, taking their own methodological and theoretical scholarly background, will each critically discuss themes from the book. Each discussant will take 12-15 min + an author response (to all discussants) 15-20 min. Carolina Ivănescu will discuss Chapter Two, examining the relationship between lay Buddhism and various forms of authority (religious/monastic, state) and its importance. She will further discuss transnational religious networks and their fluidity (reform of religious content, possible tensions), and the emphasis on orthopraxy. Jacob F. Tischer will discuss Chapter Seven and its focus on material practices in relation to the creation of affective sentiments. The materiality and globality of tea, Tischer points out, highlight Buddhism as a practice that is more than what we ordinarily think of as either ethnically defined or religious. This blurring of the margins of the religion/non-religion divide can itself be seen as a liminal space. He will connect this case study to his own experiences working on popular religion, where a material approach seems helpful when the concept of religion becomes increasingly limiting. Martin Lavička will discuss the Chinese Communist Party's regulation of religious freedoms under Xi Jinping, with particular attention to how religious teachings are increasingly infused with patriotic and other politically driven content. Prabhath Sirisena will discuss Chapter Seven, which explores the digital turn of religion in China. He will draw parallels between what Shmushko observes in China and what is emerging in the Theravāda Buddhist sphere of post-war Sri Lanka. The micro-practices of belonging enabled by technology have not only brought local Buddhist communities closer but also allowed them to form the kinds of transnational networks Ivănescu will discuss.

Part 2: a moderated discussion including audience participation will take place, exploring the place (30 min) of liminoid and liminality through the following questions: To what extent does liminality, as a framework, assist in understanding Chinese religions and Contemporary Buddhism? More than 100 years after the birth of these theories, what can we still learn from ‘liminoid’ and ‘liminality’ in religion on broader societal questions? What are the limitations of using this theory and studying through it? What do liminalities add to the significance of the study of religions within the humanities more broadly?

The book: *Multiple Liminalities of Lay Buddhism in Contemporary China Modalities, Material Culture, and Politics*, ISBN 9789087284565, published: 12 November 2024, 300 pg., English, <https://lup.nl/publications/academic-research/multiple-liminalities-of-lay-buddhism-in-contemporary-china/>

About the author: Kai Shmushko is a researcher and lecturer at the Sociology Department of the University of Amsterdam. Her academic grounding is in Taiwan and China Studies, religious studies, cultural anthropology, and sociology, with a strong orientation towards fieldwork and digital ethnography. Her primary interests are religion and spirituality among Chinese societies, Chinese migration, heritage and material culture in the Chinese sphere, cultural production in new media, and religion and politics.

ROUNDTABLE 20
Ir|Religion in Radu Jude's Filmography

Veronica Lazăr (University of Bucharest) – Convenor, **Victor Morozov** (Trinity College Dublin / Films in Frame, Bucharest) – Convenor, **Andrei Gorzo** (The I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest), **Andrei Rus** (The I. L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest), **Simion Pop** (Cultural Centre G. Coșbuc, Bistrița).

A collective investigation into the presence of religion in Radu Jude's filmography, involving philosophers, anthropologists and film critics.

ROUNDTABLE 21
Book discussion:
The Rise of Charismatic Heathenism.
Power and Popular Culture in Contemporary Norse-oriented Religion

By
Jane Haug Skjoldli
 Professor in the Study of Religion, Department of Pedagogy, Religion and Social Studies,
 Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen

Heathenism has changed. In the 2010s, the global popular culture market saw a surge in the production and consumption of Viking-themed and Norse-inspired media products, with music, movies, television series, and video games shaping public perception of Vikings, Norse mythology, and its often-presumed links to contemporary Heathenism. In this book, scholar of religion Jane Haug Skjoldli, Ph.D., traces and analyzes self-identifying Heathens' experiences of entering their religion, their encounters with deities they hold dear, their experiences with Norse-inspired music, movies, television series, and video games—and the roles such media products play in their religious conversion and practice. Using her innovative religious interaction framework to analyze Heathens' visual and aural practices, Skjoldli demonstrates how the influx of Norse-inspired media products—particularly music—give rise to charismatic authority as Heathens mix their religion to remix their reality. Offering an original way of critically studying Heathenism that challenges conventional wisdom in Pagan Studies, and to analyze links between aesthetics, media technology, and power dynamics within religious groups, this book is a must for scholars and students interested in the complex relationships between religion and popular culture.

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-032-07413-3>